

Cooking from **LONG-TERM** food storage

By Jackie Clay

All self-reliant families know they should have at least a year's worth of food and essential supplies stored up in a large pantry. Unfortunately, actually eating from long-term food storage conjures up images of consuming endless tedious, tasteless meals of boiled rice and beans. You know—"survival" food.

But this is not how my household works. If I were to serve such meals, there would be total rebellion. After all, we've had at least two years' food stored for twenty years, and we eat daily from this food. We are not martyrs, and we do not eat tasteless food in order to be "healthy." Instead, we eat three meals a day from good tasting, comforting, healthy food, much of it home-raised, home-grown or harvested from the wild.

With a little practice and imagination, any family can quickly learn to produce meals, drawn from your food storage, that draw rave reviews from family members. And you do not need to spend hours in food preparation time either.

Buying for long-term food storage

A lot of problems arise when a family purchases foods they are not used to eating, and are not especially fond of in the first place. During hard times, or in an emergency, are definitely *not* times to begin eating such "survival" food. When you're stressed out, worried, and depressed, you need a lift, not countless meals of boring, tasteless food.

Take stock of the foods your family really likes. Then build your storage pantry on these preferences. Just about anything you regularly eat can be included. One notable exception is hamburgers and cheeseburgers. You can home can hamburgers, by lightly frying tiny patties, then stacking them into wide mouth jars. I do a few, just for novelty, layered with finely chopped onion. When ready to use, reify them, adding cheese if desired. They're good, but aren't the same as the regular hamburgers the family is used to. And

there isn't an alternative to home canned hamburger available for purchase.

Have your family go through the supermarket with you and take notes as to what interests them, even if you have not cooked it before, or recently. You need variety in your long-term storage foods. Meals are like buildings. They need foundation blocks like potatoes, rice or beans, but also windows and doorways like fruits, meats, vegetables, and spices.

Choose the foods carefully, taking into consideration those you use daily or would use, if you had the time....and had no alternatives. Two frequently overlooked items are shortening/margarine and eggs. And make sure there are plenty of opportunities for "goodies," such as cookies, pies, puddings, Jello, etc.

Introducing the family to seldom-used staples

There's a definite place in a long-term storage pantry for such staples as dried beans and rice, but instead of buying all navy beans and white rice, consider that there are over a dozen varieties of beans and perhaps six varieties of rice available, each with its own unique taste, texture, appearance, and uses. In our pantry, I have many kinds of beans which we use: navy, red kidney, pinto, Anasazzi, black, and several varieties of Native American beans that we grow at home. You might include a couple of limas (which our family just does not like), cowpeas, Great Northerns, or others.

Then try a few really good recipes and gently ask all family members to try just one small serving with a meal they love.

Work your way into beans. Don't just cook up a huge pot and insist everyone eat them for a meal. You can "sneak" beans into meals by mashing cooked pintos in with taco filling, putting a few mashed beans in a layer of casserole, or into a hearty vegetable stew or soup.

Old-fashioned baked beans, complete with ham or bacon chunks, molasses and catsup will usually do the trick on a cold winter's day.

Old-fashioned baked beans

- 2 cups dry navy beans
- ¼ cup ham or bacon flavored TVPs or canned ham
- ½ cup dehydrated chopped onions
- 8 Tbsp. molasses
- 4 Tbsp. honey
- 1 Tbsp. dry mustard
- 3 Tbsp. vinegar
- ½ cup tomato sauce
- ¼ cup catsup

Sort beans, soak overnight in water enough to cover. In the morning, drain beans, discarding water. Place beans in 6-quart or larger heavy pot with 12 cups water and simmer, covered for just long enough to get beans tender (older beans require longer cooking). Drain and discard water. In a 3-quart or larger casserole, mix beans with other ingredients and bake at 350 degrees for 1½ to 2 hours, adding water if necessary to keep beans from drying out. Serve hot with fresh whole wheat bread for a comforting, hearty meal.

The same with rice. Few people like a big plate full of steamed white rice. "I don't like rice!" is the usual comment. My answer is get to know rice and all its uses.

Perhaps the easiest way to interest a family member in rice is to serve Oriental fried rice, complete with little chunks of chicken or pork. Spanish rice is another interesting way of introducing rice into a meal. The point is to introduce staples gently into meals, *before* called on to use them every day.

The use of ethnic meals is a great way to introduce a family to basics, as most less-wealthy nations have fabulous recipes, using cheaper staples as the base for meals. You can learn to do wonders with corn flour and corn meal, beans and chiles, rice, vegetables, sauces, and bits of meat, potatoes, and vegetables. I quickly learned that America is one of the few nations in the world where meat is used as the foundation of a meal. (We had adopted two older children from India and three from Korea, as well as sponsoring a family of nine from Vietnam.)

When cooking from a long-term storage pantry, learn to buy or home-can meat in smaller cans and jars. This allows one to use the meat as flavoring and texture to a meal, making a little go a long way, and not give the impression of "making do" or "surviving."

A couple of examples that we regularly use are Oriental Chicken Fried Rice and Tamale Pie. I *never* have leftovers.

Oriental chicken fried rice

- 2 cups cooked white rice, cooled
- ½ cup finely diced onions (you may substitute rehydrated dry)
- ¼ cup rehydrated freeze dried or air dried green peas
- 1 cup rehydrated shredded carrots (or fresh)
- ¼ cup oil or shortening
- 1 Tbsp. peanut butter
- ½ cup chopped cooked chicken
- 2 Tbsp. soy sauce
- 2 eggs, equivalent in dehydrated egg powder
- Spices to taste, including garlic, tumeric, hot pepper

In a large, heavy frying pan, heat oil. Add rice, onions, chicken, and carrots. Stir frequently with spatula until rice begins to lightly brown. Add peanut butter (no, it doesn't taste "weird"), soy sauce, peas, and spices. Continue stirring while flavors mix. As rice mixture appears to be done, quickly add beaten egg mixture and continue stirring with spatula until egg is cooked. Serve at once with soy sauce, sweet and sour sauce, or hot mustard sauce.

Tamale pie

- ½ cup cornmeal
- ½ cup white flour or freshly ground whole wheat flour
- ¼ cup honey or white sugar
- ¼ cup shortening
- 1 egg (equivalent in dry egg powder, rehydrated)
- 1 cup rehydrated dry milk (+ or -)
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ cup cooked hamburger (I use home canned) or beef TVP
- 2 cups tomato sauce
- ½ cup dry chopped onions
- ¼ cup dry chopped green peppers or chile peppers
- 2 tsp. mild chile powder
- ¼ cup dry sweet corn or ½ cup canned corn

Mix first eight ingredients well, making a medium batter (not runny or not stiff). Then in medium sized cast iron frying pan or 8 x 8 cake pan, mix the last six ingredients well, then top with cornmeal batter. Bake at 350 degrees until top turns golden brown. Serve hot with cold salsa.

Homemade pizza

Crust:

2 cups flour
½ tsp. seasoning salt
¼ cup olive oil
2 tsp. dry yeast
1 cup, plus warm water

Mix dry yeast and one cup warm water. While softening, mix other ingredients in medium bowl. Add softened yeast and enough warm water to make a soft, but not tacky, ball of dough. Work dough with hands, greased with a small bit of olive oil until elastic, then set aside in bowl, covered, for half an hour to rise. Oil baking pan with liberal olive oil, press out dough with hands. Prick dough with fork every few inches to avoid bubbles. Bake at 350 degrees until just barely done. It will not be browned but will lift easily from pan when picked up with a fork at corner.

Topping:

1 cup thick tomato sauce
1 tsp. brown sugar

Such goodies as homemade pizza are always hits at home, especially in an emergency or hard-times situation. Key ingredients, such as pepperoni and mozzarella cheese, are in few long-term storage pantries. When one has their own dairy animal, the cheese is a snap, and dry-cured pepperoni lasts for months without refrigeration under cool, dry conditions. I also have canned chunks of pepperoni and am going to try mozzarella cheese too. But without these options, pizza is still a definite “go”. Check out recipe above.

But we'll miss fried foods!

I think one of the things a family misses most, living totally from a long-term storage pantry, is simple fried foods. Now this can have an up side, as well as a down. The fewer the fried foods consumed, the better health we enjoy. But, honestly speaking, some fried foods do a lot to boost our morale during rough times.

Now, of course, if a family has their own garden, which a self-reliant family should have anyway, they will have abundant potatoes, fresh or in the cellar. If not, you can fry up a batch of canned potatoes, from time to time, or make potato patties out of leftover mashed potatoes (adding two beaten eggs to hold them together). There are also dehydrated and freeze-dried hashbrowns that are quite good.

One satisfying, simple recipe we enjoy from our pantry is fried tuna patties. This provides meat, as well as satisfying an occasional craving for “fried food.”

1 Tbsp. rehydrated green peppers
1 Tbsp. dry onion
¼ cup chopped olives
¼ cup sausage TVPs
1 tsp. oregano
¼ tsp. garlic powder
½ tsp. basil
1 cup mozzarella or
½ cup dried grated parmesan cheese

Spread tomato sauce evenly on baked crust and sprinkle brown sugar, green peppers, olives, and spices on top. Top with cheese. Bake until cheese is barely golden brown and bubbly. This is yummy, and it is much in demand at our house. As a bonus, there are many variations including making a double batch of crust, using the second dough to be formed as bread sticks, which can be brushed with tomato sauce, herbs, and sprinkled with cheese and baked at the same time as the pizza. The bread sticks, dipped in a warm herbed tomato sauce, make a great addition to the steaming pizza.

Roast beef hash is another “alternative” fried food. Unless fresh meat, either home grown or wild, is available, there will be little fried meat available.

One of the home storage pantry's best capabilities is providing quick, nutritious soups and stews at quick notice. These include those using pasta and noodles, as well as the more traditional. One of our favorites is homemade noodles, cooked with chicken broth. You can use store-bought noodles, but there is absolutely no comparison in taste or texture. And noodles are very easy to make, only taking a few minutes once you get the hang of it. Even “mistakes” are very edible.

Fried tuna patties

2 cans light tuna, drained
1 cup crushed dried bread crumbs
¼ cup dehydrated onion flakes
3 eggs, rehydrated equivalent
½ tsp. lemon pepper
flour to coat patties
oil to fry

Mix drained tuna, bread crumbs, egg, onion flakes, and lemon pepper. Divide into golf ball-sized portions, pat into patties, dip both sides in flour. Heat oil to medium heat and gently place patties into frying pan. After one side is done, turn and finish cooking. This is a quick and easy alternative to “fish sticks.”

Roast beef hash

1 pint (16 oz) canned roast beef (or wild meat)
½ cup rehydrated onion flakes
1 quart (32 oz) canned potatoes, drained well
oil to fry

Grind meat, potatoes and onion together with hand meat grinder. Heat oil to medium heat in large frying pan. Slide hash into pan, being careful not to spatter. Arrange the hash in a shallow layer, covering the bottom of the frying pan. Allow to cook, turning and stirring with spatula. Add seasonings, finish frying to preference, and serve. Popular condiments include salsa and catsup. Hash makes a satisfying one-dish meal. Leftovers are great for breakfast with scrambled eggs.

Homemade noodles in chicken broth

1½ cup flour (either freshly ground whole wheat or white)
¼ tsp. salt
2 eggs, reconstituted or fresh

Place flour in mound on board, making a nest or well in the center of the mound. Pour eggs into nest. Beat the eggs with a fork, gradually bringing the flour into the mix. Work the dough into a ball with your hands, picking up only as much flour as it takes to make a stiff, but workable ball. Knead the dough for about five minutes. It should not stick to the board. If it seems too moist, add a little more flour; if too dry, dampen your hands and knead longer.

Divide the ball into quarters. Cover three and reserve one to work with immediately. Lightly sprinkle board with flour and roll out dough, pulling it into a uniform thickness oval. Make it as thin as workable and let rest in a warm, dry place. Repeat with other three quarters.

When all dough is dry, but not stiff and brittle, roll like a jelly roll, cutting into desired thickness with a sharp knife. You can then either fluff out to separate and then carefully hang to dry or lay it flat to air dry for an hour.

Pour a quart of chicken broth (or use dry chicken granules to make a broth) into a large pot. Add diced, canned, or freeze dried chicken meat, if desired, as well as onion, carrots, and spices as wanted. Bring to a medium boil, then carefully add noodles, simmering just long enough to make them tender. The flour on the noodles provides natural thickening. You'll get raves for this simple, yet satisfying meal.

Breads

Don't forget the staff of life. Breads provide an endless base to home meals, unlike their tasteless plastic wrapped cousins from the store. On one camping trip, we made an entire meal out of a crispy, fragrant loaf of French bread, without a dab of butter.

Breads can be made of varying flours for entirely different tastes, textures, and appearances. Aside from the "normal" white flour from the store, one can, and should, grind their own grains, producing a wide, wonderful, array of fresh flours. This produces a wholesome taste that most folks have never even dreamed of.

As all grains store much longer as whole grains, it is wise to stock up on these grains and grind the flours as you need them. Some suggestions are red and golden hard wheat for bread, soft wheat for pastries, flour corn for cornmeal, hominy corn for corn flour, buckwheat for pancake flour, rye for rye and pumpernickel bread, and rice for Asian cooking.

You will find that when you are cooking solely from the long-term storage pantry under times of duress, just the milling of the flour and baking of bread will bring peace and contentment to the whole family.

While "plain" bread will probably be most often used, stretch your creativity by expanding to more "exotic" breads such as pitas, tortillas, and sweet rolls, both for taste and variety. Most use about the same simple ingredients, and with just a little variation you can create a whole spectrum of tastes and possibilities.

Basic whole wheat bread

Heat 4 cups milk (rehydrated dry or fresh). Soften 4 Tbsp. dry yeast in ¾ cup warm water. Add ¼ c. honey to warm milk, along with 1/3 cup oil or melted shortening, 2 tsp. salt, and 2 eggs.

Beat well, then as milk cools to luke warm, gently add yeast. Add about 14 c. fresh whole wheat flour, one cup at a time, mixing after each. When nearly stiff, mix with hands, incorporating just enough flour to make an elastic, workable ball of dough. Don't stop if it's sticky, and don't get it too stiff. Knead on a floured board for 10 minutes. Grease a large mixing bowl, place ball into bowl, and grease top. Pull ball out and put back in, greased top up. Cover with a warm, damp kitchen towel and let rise in warm place until about double. Knock down and let rise again. Divide into two or three loaves and place into greased bread pans. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. When loaves are nearly doubled in size, place in oven and bake for about 35 minutes until tops are golden brown. Grease tops with margarine to soften. Enjoy the best bread you've ever tasted.

One of our favorite breads is a versatile quick roll recipe. This recipe makes soft, tender dinner rolls, but also free-form breads, hamburger buns, sweet rolls, and coffee cake with little change.

Halftime spoon rolls

Dissolve 2 tsp. dry yeast in ½ cup warm water, and set aside. Combine 1/3 cup shortening, ¼ cup of sugar or honey, 1 tsp. salt with ¾ cup hot milk (reconstituted dry or fresh). Cool to lukewarm by adding ½ cup cold water. Add 1 egg (or equivalent reconstituted dry) and softened yeast. Mix in 3½ cups sifted flour. Cover in same bowl, letting rise in a warm place till doubled. Stir dough with greased spoon. With an ice cream scoop (works easiest) dip sticky batter into greased muffin tins, filling half full. Let rise and bake at 375 degrees until golden brown. Remove from oven and brush margarine on top to soften nicely. I promise raves from this one. And you can modify it easily. With the addition of just a little more flour (about ½ cup), the dough will be firm enough to handle lightly, which makes forming hamburger buns on a greased cookie sheet easy, or forming into caramel rolls, cinnamon rolls, or coffee cake.

Tips for cooking from home storage

Cooking from a long-term storage pantry is easy, basic, and very fulfilling. But it is not something one learns to do overnight. It's sort of like gardening. The time to learn to garden is *not* when the trucks stop hauling food to supermarkets and there are acute food shortages. It takes time to get into the rhythm of gardening, learning what works, what does not, and how to do the most work with the least effort.

When a person plunges into cooking solely from home storage, they are quite often frustrated by "all the hard work," the poor results from their cooking, and the lack of enthusiasm from family members. Sort of like when a new young bride begins cooking for her husband for the first time. The results are often ho-hum.

Try taking one day a week, at first, to practice cooking out of your storage pantry. Ease into it with a few of these recipes; they are easy and basic. Then expand to others, found in some of the books listed below. Mennonite, Amish, Mormon, and Seventh Day Adventist cookbooks usually provide a good start for comforting, tasty meals with basics, as these religions stress commonsense preparedness and good family eating from basic, healthy ingredients.

It's well to mention at this time that it makes good sense to develop a small garden, at least, and learn to forage for

wild foods (which are great tasting, by the way), while learning to cook meals from the food you have stored. Fresh foods are a very welcome change to dehydrated and canned, and they not only taste great, but provide extra nutrition, which could conceivably be lacking in a few long-term storage foods.

Likewise, if it is at all possible, develop your own source of fresh milk, eggs, and meat. Grandmas all over the world raised a small flock of chickens, even in town. It's funny that the U.S. is one of the few countries where this is not common today. Remember that variety is truly the spice of life; cultivate all the variety you can in your family's diet.

You'll find you get into the rhythm of this type of cooking easily. And you'll quickly develop time-saving ways of doing things. For instance, it didn't take me long to decide that if I ground a week's worth of grains I truly saved time, and cleaning of the grain mill, and I always had the grain I needed on hand conveniently.

I can honestly say that it takes only minutes longer per meal to prepare a great dining experience from my pantry than it does to rip and pry plastic wrap from something that appears to be food. And it makes the whole family feel great. We believe in *living*, not just surviving!

Suggested Reading

Amish Country Cooking by Andy & Millie Yoder

Bread Winners by Mel London

Cookin' with Home Storage by Vicki Tate

Dehydrated Food Cooking by Stan Smith

Kitchen Magic-Cooking with Common Grains by Deanna Sudweeks

Marlene's Magic with Food Storage by Marlene Peterson

The Natural Nine (Cooking with the 9 most common grains) By Lorraine D. Tyler Δ

LOTTERY

I once heard a story
About a guy with the same problems as I...
Going broke,
Imminent divorce,
No sex...
One morning he committed suicide
And they found a lottery ticket in his pocket.
That evening it won.
I doubt the story's true.
I'd have heard about it on TV.
Anchormen and talk show hosts love that kind of story.
Still, there's a briefcase in my car,
In it there's a lottery ticket,
Beside it there's a gun,
They're both waiting.

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